

DECISION MEMORANDUM
Bighorn sheep sampling
DOI-BLM-AZ-G020-2015-0010-CX

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Ironwood Forest National Monument

Project Description

The Arizona Game and Fish department currently lack disease exposure and genetic information from the Silver Bell population of bighorn sheep. As a result, they are unable to make informed decisions about translocating bighorn sheep both, into this population to augment it, and out of this population to augment other populations. A science-informed decision-making process must guide these management efforts and having information about disease exposure and genetic diversity will be critical as we continue to proactively manage the states bighorn populations to increase their numbers. Beginning in the spring of 2015, Department personnel propose to capture approximately 20 bighorn sheep on BLM, private and State Trust lands in the Silver Bell and Waterman Mountain complex within the Ironwood Forest National Monument. Samples will be taken from bighorn to test for disease and to gather genetic information on genetic diversity. Bighorn will be marked with ear tags and approximately 5-10 rams would be collared with satellite GPS collars to track metapopulation dynamics (movements between mountain ranges) that may influence future management decisions. Bighorn would be captured using either dart guns, drop nets, or via helicopter and net guns, or a combination of the three. The helicopter staging area would take place off of BLM lands to eliminate any ground disturbance. Additional sampling may be necessary in the future depending on the outcome of these initial sampling efforts.

Bighorn sheep would initially be located from a helicopter and captured by using a net gun fired from the helicopter at close range. Pursuit of any individual bighorn sheep by helicopter would be limited to no more than five minutes. Immediately after firing the net, the helicopter would land nearby and one or two crew members would exit the helicopter and restrain the bighorn sheep. No chemical immobilization is required for this technique. Captured bighorn sheep would be processed at the capture site by the capture crew and the animal would be released on site after processing. Once a bighorn sheep is captured it receives a physical examination; age and body condition (i.e., body fat) would be measured, and blood and fecal samples would be collected to survey herd health by screening for exposure to diseases and parasite loads. An Arizona Game and Fish Department wildlife health specialist would participate in all captures and translocations and would ensure the health of all animals and attend to any health concerns. Select captured bighorn sheep would be fitted with VHF or VHF/GPS collars and marked with numbered and colored ear tags. VHF/GPS collars currently in use by the Arizona Game and Fish Department are programmed to drop off automatically after two to three years. Care would be taken to ensure that the collars are fit snugly and do not slide up and down the animal's neck.

Of the three most common techniques used to capture desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*), net-gun capture generally causes fewer and lower-level stress physiological parameters, the lowest mortality rate, and the lowest combined morbidity and mortality rate. Only one of 137 (0.7%) bighorn sheep net-gun captured between 1983 and 1986 showed signs of capture myopathy, and two (1.5%) died of injuries (Jessup et al., 1988). Ongoing netgun capture efforts in Arizona continue to have a capture mortality rate below 1%.

Helicopter landings will only be permitted at specified locations shown on map in the Watermans. Mountains to avoid impacts to Nichol Turks-head cactus.

Approval and Decision

Based on a review of the project described in the attached Categorical Exclusion documentation and Ironwood Forest National Monument staff recommendations, I have determined that the project is in conformance with the *Ironwood Forest National Monument* Resource Management Plan (approved 2013) and is categorically excluded from further environmental analysis. It is my decision to approve the action as proposed *with* the following stipulations/mitigation measures. *1. Helicopter landings will only be permitted at specified locations shown on map in the Waterman Mountains to avoid impacts to Nichol Turks-head cactus.*

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and the attached Form 1842-1. If an appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed at Tucson Field Office, 3201 E Universal Way, Tucson AZ 85756 within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition (pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) (request) for a stay (suspension) of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the Office of the Solicitor (Department of the Interior, Office of the Field Solicitor, Sandra Day O'Connor U.S. Court House #404, 401 West Washington Street SPC44, Phoenix, AZ 85003-2151) (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

1. The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
2. The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits,
3. The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
4. Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

/s/ Bruce Sillitoe

4/22/15

Bruce Sillitoe
Acting Field Office Manager

Date

Attachment: Form 1842-1